together—though we always done our duty by each other—ef we'd had money. Married folks find that out pretty soon, though when they are courtin it don't seem possible. Yes—yes—yes; lots of things wouldn't hev been said that I feel to be sorry for ef your pa and me had been forehanded. Even the little legacy I have come into since hadn't come then, and I couldn't do nothin I wanted to."

Herford turned his back on his mother for a moment, and stood looking out over the little half curtain into the back garden, where the vines and rosebushes were all wrapped up in straw, and where some garments pinned to the lines were dancing wild fandangoes in the evening breeze.

"But if he had had to leave you, mother, to go away for years in order to make the money," he said slowly, "and had given you the choice between being as you were and parting, what then?"

"Well, Fordy," answered the old woman with a sigh, "considerin all things, I'd hev had to say, 'Lord, bring you back safe,' but I should have had to say 'go.' But your pa never had no such chance, my son, and he warn't ambitious. I couldn't rouse him up. I used to wish I was the man sometimes; I'd have showed him."

A little touch of reproach was in her voice, and the hard look was strong upon her face as she poured the tea into the old, pagoda pattern teacups. They were very quiet that evening, and Herford went to his room very early.

The day before Christmas Groton is busier than ever. There are extra clerks in all the shops. Servants are running in haste to the groceries. Mothers are slipping in at side doors and back entrances with parcels under their wraps. Children whose faith in Santa Claus is fast fading are watching them with big, round eyes. Behind locked doors girls are hard at work putting the finishing touch to bits of fancy work. Wagons go about the streets loaded with little Christmas trees. A white headed old negro hobbles from house to house selling bunches of "dried yarbs." Mrs. Wayne buys some for the stuffing of her turkey. She is making mince pies. Her heart is very soft, for in the annual cleaning up she come across old Christmas gifts marked "Eben to Annah." No one calls her by her odd, old fashioned name now. She remembered what a soft sound it used to have on Eben's lips.

"He was just as good a man as ever lived," she says to herself, "and ef we warn't rich we was real happy, Eben and me, mostly; anyhow, 'twas my fault ef we warn't always."

The demon of discontent has totally departed from Marjorie's heart. She sings as she ties up her Christmas gifts in little parcels, adding a painted card to each. The prettiest of all the gifts is for Herford, and on his card is a tender little motto.

"I wonder what ailed me yesterday!" she asks herself as she looks in the glass. "I'm sure I don't envy any woman, rich or poor," and she kisses the little ring to which she gave a contemptuous thought the day before.

At this moment Herford, at his desk in the factory, where he has a clerkship, sits, feeling very bitterly. He is disappointed in Marjorie. Yes, and in his mother. Like most men, he fails to comprehend the evanescent nature of women's discontent, and fancies that what they say one day they think the next.

"Robins was right," he says to himself. "Money and what money will bring is what they value most. Even mother blames poor father yet for not having been rich. Ah, well, it is a hard truth to know, but it is better than to deceive myself."

He has made out the pay roll, with its extra work and deductions. One name has been scored out. The poor fellow hanged himself last Sunday.

"If a man ain't rich, he'd better be dead," Herford had heard him say. He gave a bitter smile as he thought of it. Then he drew a pad of paper toward him, wrote two letters and directed them, and beckoned to old Mike Flanagan, who was making up the fire in the office stove. The hours wore on until it was noontime and a half holiday. As the paymaster paid the men they filed out of the building. Old Mike, with his wages in his pocket, came back to sweep the place out.

At 1 o'clock Herford's mother looked out of her window, wondering that her boy did not come to dinner.

Marjorie was at hers. Herford often went out of his way to pass her house and get a word with her, but this time she waited in vain. Suddenly a low rumble fell on her ears—a sound that she would have taken for thunder but that it was a frosty winter day. The mother heard it also and ran out upon her porch. The next moment Marjorie lay on the floor in a swoon, and Annah Wayne was one of a terrified crowd all bent in one direction.

The rumble had been followed by a report as of cannon, and flames were issuing from the factory windows, and before their very eyes the tall brick walls of the building bent and swayed like a card house carelessly touched by a child's finger.

That Christmas day many a workman's wife thanked heaven that her husband was safe at home when the factory fell. One or two had been bruised or cut as they fled from the courtyard. Poor Mike Flanagan had been brought home to his daughter's house dead. They guessed that a spark from his pipe had fired some explosive stuff stowed in the building, but no one ever quite knew what happened.

Annah Wayne stood on the street all night, watching the men who were working among the debris of the factory. At dawn some neighbors led her home and put her to bed.

Two doors were streaming wide, the mince pies still stood upon the window sill, where they had been set to cool. They thoughtfully put them away and made preparations for a funeral. No one dared to look in at the lid of the coffin around which they stood while the old clergyman prayed for the "widow who had an only son, and he died."

CHAPTER III.

POOR MARJORIE WAS DOING PENANCE.

Months came and went and made a year. Again the church was decked with evergreens, again the grocers and confectioners made their windows gay, again fond mothers played the pretty Santa Claus farce, and stockings hung in the ingleside, and Christmas trees were dressed with sugar doves and glistening colored balls and golden stars and tapers. The old herb seller went about, and the man with spice berries, but neither of them went near Annah Wayne's door. It was known that she would buy nothing. For a twelvemonth after the death of a relative all Groton people tied their shutters with black ribbon. Annah Wayne did it every year.

"This is the way I keep my Christmas," she once said bitterly to a neighbor who saw her at her task, and who only shook her head in answer.

On that day she kept fast and vigil in her darkened kitchen, swinging to and fro in the big rocking chair. She had never been given to tears. Now her eyes seemed utterly dry, but her heart was weeping.

Another woman in Groton cried for two during the holidays. This was Marjorie Chadwick. Marjorie had become a teacher in the district school and seemed to have renounced all idea of matrimony. It was a known fact that she refused to receive "gentlemen callers." She had put on a sort of modified widow's mourning for Herford, which she still wore. She never went to parties. She gave presents only to poor people who needed them, and though she regularly went to the church to assist in decorating it with evergreens, she would never allow a wreath to be hung in her own window. In fact, poor Marjorie was doing penance, being firmly convinced of the fact that she had brought a judgment upon herself by her own wicked discontent, and especially by saying things she should not have said during that last walk with her betrothed husband, when she should have been so thankful and happy. She had resolved to take life sadly forevermore, to do her humble duty and not distress people or talk of her own trials. To wear her cross beneath her cloak if need be, but still to wear it all her life.

Now and then she called on Mrs. Wayne. They never talked of their mutual trouble, but she always took with her a small jar of jelly, as she did to those who were ill. She did not, however, pay these calls at Christmastide.

On the fifth anniversary of the day of her walk with Herford, Marjorie was alone in the church dressing it. Evening was closing in and most of the ladies had felt obliged to go to their homes, but she had lingered. The occupation pleased her. And when it was too dark to go up the ladder and hang the evergreens she could still tie the small bits together, making long ropes for wreaths and festoons. The heater had been lit and the church was warm. One of the doors stood open. Beyond lay the smooth stone path that led to the street. There had been talk of removing the graveyard, but it had not been done. Few new headstones had been added of late years however. The last funeral that had passed between the stone urns at the gateway was that which she should never forget while memory remained to her.

From where she sat she could see Mrs. Wayne's little plot. Three stones stood together there. The last, on which Herford's name was graven, was distinguished from the others by its whiteness in the daytime. Now, from the church the whole scene was like a delicate picture in gray. From without the observer could only see, against a mysterious background, the yellow globe of light that flung its radiance over Marjorie's bright tresses and fair face, and her white hands defined clearly by her black dress as she bound the bits of evergreen together.

She was unconscious of an observer, and worked on, dreaming the while of the pleasant face and merry ways of the boy who had begun to make love to her before his school days were over, wincing as she thought that her last afternoon was spent in stabbing him with cruel little flings.

"Oh, I was hateful to him," she confided to the evergreens, and any angel who might happen to be listening. "Oh, I was hateful! But it does seem hard that I should never be happy again in all my life." Her eyes were full of tears, but she quickly brushed them away, for a step sounded in her ear, and in a moment more some one had entered the church and was coming up the aisle to the spot where she sat. It was a young man she had met very frequently of late, since his family joined the church.

"How devoted you are," he said. "Really, quite like a sister of charity, and how quickly you work. I've been watching you from outside; quite a mediaeval picture; like an illumination, you know. Really there was a halo about your head, and you looked—you'll have to forgive me for saying it, I can't help it—you looked so beautiful."

It is very hard to make an answer to such a speech. Marjorie Chadwick could only say, "Oh, Mr. Stanisland."

And he answered, "Oh, but I couldn't help thinking it, really."

He was one of the young men from the Heights; the only son of a very wealthy resident. His clothes came from London and he had that indescribable look which the word stylish does not fully express.

Marjorie was seated on a little carpeted hassock. He took another and sat near her.

"Do you know I'm so glad I happened to pass and see you," he said. He paused and showed his white teeth in a smile. "Yes," he went on, "very glad, for I want to talk to you. I've resolved to talk to you for a long while. The very first moment I saw you, you seemed different to me from any one else, and the feeling increases. I really like you so much that I do not know how to tell you about it; I don't, indeed. And I should be a very happy fellow if you liked me. Won't you, can't you, will you marry me, Miss Chadwick? Will you? Oh, pray say you will." He was very young, was very much in earnest. As Marjorie listened, the thought that if he were not a millionaire he was certain to be one did occur to her. If she accepted him, all she had longed for, as people long for what they feel sure they can never have, would be hers. A residence on the Heights, a carriage, diamonds, trips to Europe, position. She gave a great gasp. For a moment she was tempted. Then she remembered her vows of renunciation. She would be true to Herford's memory, true while she lived. She would do penance always, always.

"Marjorie," the young man was saying. "Marjorie, won't you speak to me?" and she answered:

"Mr. Stanisland, I shall be very sorry if I give you pain, but I have done with all that forever. I have loved once, I can never love again. I have promised myself that I will not."

The young man came closer to her and put his arm about her waist.

"That is all very beautiful, being true to some one's memory," he said. "But with a long life before you it's not possible, you know. Think it over—think it over—don't say 'no' now."

"Oh, I must always say no to any one who asks me," Marjorie said. The evergreen had dropped out of her hand. Young Stanisland still sat with one arm lightly about her. Now he took her fingers in his and lifted them to his lips. As he did so his back was turned to the door, and over his bent head she saw a figure standing there. The fading light fell full upon its face. It wore the features of the dead. It resembled Herford Wayne. As she gazed, it turned and moved away, and where the three gravestones stood side by side—his father's, his sister's and his own—seemed to vanish. With him all else departed also for awhile. The first thing Marjorie knew Stanisland was kissing her forehead. He had brought some water and held it to her lips.

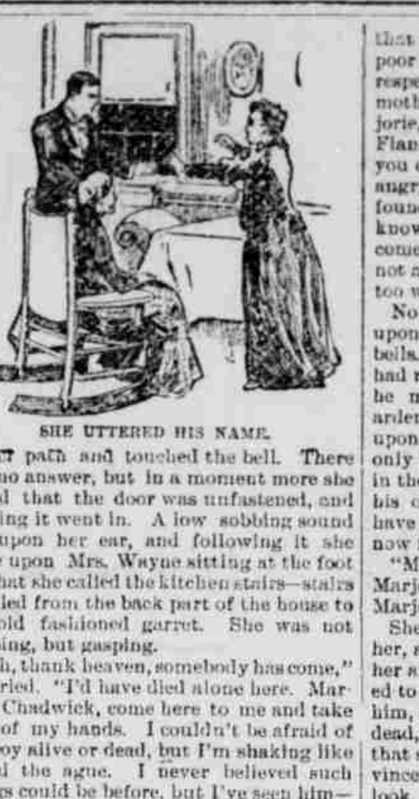
"I'm sorry I distressed you," he said. "Shan't I get a cab? You'll not be able to walk home."

She was strong enough, she averred, but he went for the carriage nevertheless.

"Goodby," he said at the door. "And perhaps after all you will think it over."

CHAPTER IV.

Poor Marjorie, as she was driven along, felt that it would be unpleasant to explain at home that she had fainted in church and been sent home in a cab by Mr. Stanisland. They would ask how she came to be alone there with him. And as she passed Mrs. Wayne's garden gate she decided to stop there and spend a few moments. She dismissed the cab and went slowly up the



SHE UTTERED HIS NAME.

gravel path and touched the bell. There was no answer, but in a moment more she found that the door was unfastened, and opening it went in. A low sobbing sound fell upon her ear, and following it she came upon Mrs. Wayne sitting at the foot of what she called the kitchen stairs—stairs that led from the back part of the house to the old fashioned garret. She was not weeping, but gasping.

"Oh, thank heaven, somebody has come," she cried. "I'd have died alone here. Marjorie Chadwick, come here to me and take hold of my hands. I couldn't be afraid of my boy alive or dead, but I'm shaking like I had the ague. I never believed such things could be before, but I've seen him—I've seen Herford—he's appeared to me."

"His spirit?" whispered Marjorie, sinking down beside the old woman and chafing her cold palms.

"What could it be but his spirit? We sat together there, in that room, and heard the dominie preach his funeral sermon; we stood by his grave and heard the clods fall on his coffin, but there he stood, just like he used to look, only pale. 'Mother,' I heard him say, 'mother,' and he held out his arms like he used to when he was a baby, for me to take him. He seemed holdin 'em out to the house; he didn't look at me. I'd just tied the shutters with black ribbon, as I always do for Christmas, and I'd been to the well for water. I was sittin down on the stone under the lilac bushes to rest me, for I ain't very strong nowadays, when I saw him. He seemed to be weepin and wailin softly to himself. 'Oh, my happy home,' he said; 'oh, mother, mother,' and I couldn't move. I turned giddy, and it's only five minutes ago that I managed to get in the house. Either I've lost my mind or I'm going to die within the year. They come for warnings."

"Do they?" said Marjorie dreamily. "Then I am to die also, for he came to me there in the churchyard."

"God have mercy on us!" gasped the old woman.

There are moments when hearts open to each other. This was one. Sitting there upon the little back stairs in the darkness, the two women made confession to each other.

"I must tell somebody," said poor Marjorie. "It seems as if the way I acted to Herford, the last day of his life, was burning into my heart like a coal of fire. I went on about not being rich; I talked about rich husbands as if I wanted one. He must have thought I didn't care for him, and that day he didn't kiss me when he left me, and I never saw him again."

"How I used to nag my husband; how I used to wish Herford was ambitious!" said Mrs. Wayne. "After grandfather left me his little money I educated him as well as I could. I wanted him to get rich, to get some kind of political office, to be somebody. I always felt as if his father might, if he'd just buckle to. I was so disappointed when he took a clerk's place at the factory that I cried. Now, only to have him there again, coming home to tea, calling, 'Hullo, little Mamsy,' in at the kitchen window!"

"Ah! if he could only come to take me out tomorrow afternoon, I shouldn't envy any rich woman," sighed Marjorie. "I want to tell you something. I refused Mr. Stanisland today. I shall refuse any one who asks me—if any one does again. I'll live and die as if I was Herford's widow."

"It couldn't be expected of you," said the old woman. "So young and real pretty too. But I love you for loving my Fordy so. I guess we'd have got along real good ef it had been the Lord's will you should marry him."

Anything will startle people already overwrought.

A foot upon the path, a touch upon the door caused these two women to cry out, to clasp each other fast, but Mrs. Wayne arose and lit a lamp and opened the door to Dominie Thawler, who had preached in the rickety little building in which she worshiped for thirty years, who had married her to her husband, christened Herford and prayed over his coffin.

"It's good of you to come, dominie," she said; "come in," and led the way to the parlor, a tidy room, a little close with disuse.

"I noticed, Sister Wayne," the minister said without preface, "that you keep mourning on your shutters still. Why do you do it?"

"I couldn't tell you so that you'd understand, dominie," she answered. "I couldn't tell any one that hadn't been a mother."

"Take the black ribbons off your shutters," said the preacher; "keep Christmas as a Christian this year, Sister Wayne."

"My Christmas is fasting and tears," said the widow. "Can you remember the day you stood here last and expect me to rejoice when Christmas time comes round? Seems to me you ought to respect my feelings more."

The minister went to the window and raised it, and untied the black ribbons from the shutters and flung the latter open.

"Let the light shine out upon the road this Christmas eve," he said. "Let it cheer the belated traveler on his way—some one that might be going home to his mother, perhaps—home to spend Christmas with his mother."

"Let her light her lamp then," said Mrs. Wayne. "Why should I? My son will come to me no more." The minister turned about and faced her.

"If it was the Lord's will that he should return to you he would come, Sister Wayne," he said.

"The Lord himself can't undo death," she answered.

"A young man called upon me tonight, who thought his mother dead," said the minister. "When I told him that she lived and mourned for him, you should have seen his happy face. He had seen her house closed, with black ribbons on the shutters, and in the graveyard, side by side, three stones—his father's, his sister's and his mother's, he supposed. It was too dark to read the names. He believed that in his absence his mother had departed this life, and he came to me to ask particulars. What I said to him was: 'Young man, I preached your funeral sermon five years ago. These cases of mistaken identity sometimes occur. The stone you saw is over your own remains.'"

The widow uttered a cry and clasped her hands. "There, I cannot keep him out any longer. I do not believe that joy ever kills," said Dominie Thawler. He stepped away from the French window against which he had set his back, and as he did so Herford Wayne rushed into the room, sank at his mother's feet and knelt there with his arms about her waist and his head upon her bosom, sobbing like a child.

The old preacher slipped away. A little figure stood trembling outside the door. A miracle had happened. Herford lived, was here before her eyes again. But, alas! he did not think of her. His mother was all to him.

"I never knew of the destruction of the factory," he was saying. "I had been offered a chance to make my fortune, and had to be on board a seagoing vessel that evening to join Robins, if I took it. I felt that women needed to be rich, that for a poor man there could be neither love nor respect nor happiness. I felt like that, mother. I wrote to you, I wrote to Marjorie, and gave the letters to old Mike Flanagan to deliver. Yours never reached you of course. But I thought you were too angry to answer. As for Marjorie, she has found her millionaire, as I happen to know. And, at all events, since I have come home no richer than I went, I should not aspire to her hand, I know her views too well.

No richer than he went. The words fell upon Majorie's ear like the sound of joy bells. If Herford had made his fortune, had returned a wealthy man, then, indeed, he must have wooed Marjorie long and ardently before she would have smiled upon him. But since he was still poor, only the knowledge that he had seen her in the church when Stanisland was making his offer of marriage, and that he must have fancied them lovers, restrained her now from obeying the dictates of her heart.

"Marjorie!" cried the mother. "Why, Marjorie is here. How could I forget her? Marjorie! Marjorie!"

She moved forward. He turned and saw her, and she uttered his name and held out her arms to him, and no words were needed to tell him that of all men she loved him, and him only, and that, thinking him dead, she had still been true to him. All that she told him afterward did not convince him more completely than that one look.

They sat there hand in hand, saying so much to each other, until suddenly the deep sound of the church bell fell upon their ears. Twelve strokes—it was no longer Christmas eve, it was Christmas day. Christmas day, and grief had flown away through those unbound shutters, and joy and love had entered in.

As Herford had walked home with Marjorie the sound of the organ and of Christmas music came to them from the church upon the Heights. Still other voices rang out where they kept watch night in the old town. It seemed to these two lovers as though the angels sung in heaven and sung for them alone.

No black ribbons floated from Annah Wayne's windows that Christmas day—every shutter was flung wide. From far and near the neighbors came with glad congratulations and good things for the feast. Some brought turkey, some brought pies. A little Englishwoman sent a slab of her plum pudding with a bit of mistletoe in it. Apples and oranges rolled in, jugs of cider were there, dainty dishes galore, cakes white with frosting, all offerings of congratulation from kindly hearts; and in the evening a fiddler appeared upon the scene, and all the young people followed him as though he had been the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Merrily they footed it in the long silent house, and prettiest and happiest of all the dancers was Marjorie.

Happier still on that bright day in holiday week, when all Groton flocked to the church to see her married to Herford Wayne. Happy ever since as mortals can be, she declares, now that she decks a Christmas tree and hangs stockings in her chimneypiece for half a dozen children.

"For there are things gold cannot buy," she says. "And though I am richer now than I ever dreamed of being, it is love, not money, that makes our Christmas merry."

THE END

A Conventional Custom.

One of the simplest instincts of good manners would seem to be that a man should uncover his head while eating his dinner with his family; yet it is pretty certain that the first gentlemen of England two centuries ago habitually wore their hats during that ceremony, nor is it known just when or why the practice was changed. In Pepys' famous Diary, which is the best manual of manners for its period, we read, under date of Sept. 22, 1664, "Home to bed, having got a strange cold in my head by flinging off my hat at dinner and sitting with the wind in my neck."

In Lord Clarendon's essay on the decay of respect paid to age he says that in his younger days he never kept his hat on before those older than himself except at dinner. Lord Clarendon died in 1674. That the English members of parliament sit with their hats on during the sessions is well known, and the same practice prevailed at the early town meetings in New England. The presence or absence of the hat is therefore simply a conventionality, and so it is with a thousand practices which are held, so long as they exist, to be the most unchangeable and matter of course affairs.—Harper's Bazar.

When a Man Is Thirty Years of Age.

All men who employ animals in work know how their speed falls off with increasing age. Race horses are withdrawn from the track shortly after they have arrived at the full possession of their force; they are still good for competitions in bottom, and are capable for many years yet of doing excellent trotting service, but they cannot run in trials of speed.

Man's capacity to run likewise decreases after he has passed thirty years; and the professional couriers who are still seen in Tunis, running over large distances in an incredibly short time, are obliged to retire while still young. Those who continue to run after they are forty years old all finally succumb with grave heart affections.—Popular Science Monthly.

His Predicament.

Lady (to deaf butcher)—Well, Mr. Smallbones, how do you find yourself today?

Smallbones—Well, I'm pretty well used up, mum. Every rib's gone, they've almost torn me to pieces for my shoulders, and I never had such a run on my legs.—London Tit-Bits.

An English writer asserts that no matter what species of oysters are placed in the English beds, where the natives are in excess, they very soon, "by interbreeding, become of a uniform character, the descendants being all practically native oysters."

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